

Oregon Technical Advisory Committee Meeting
Final Minutes
September 24, 2002
Canby, Oregon

Purpose: To update committee members on program changes and receive advice on policy considerations.

Participants:

Bob Graham, NRCS State Conservationist (co-chair); **Fred Ringer**, FSA Program Manager (substituting co-chair); **Bill Braunworth**, OSU Extension; **Darrel Kenops & Tom Byler**, Governor's Office; **Jean Wilkinson & Pete Test**, Farm Bureau; **Jeff Rola**, Oregon Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils; **Sam Asai**, FSA State Committee Member; **Eric Henning**, Pheasants Forever; **Timmie Mandish & Chris Hamilton** US Fish and Wildlife Service; **Tammy Dennee**, Oregon Wheat Growers League; **Johnny Sunddstrom**, Oregon Association of Conservation Districts; **F.X. Rosica**, American Farmland Trust; **Tom Paul**, Oregon Water Resources Department; **Bruce Taylor**, Wetland Joint Ventures; **Dalton Straus**, FSA State Committee; **Lynn Butts (substituting)** Oregon Small Woodlands Association; **Mack Barrington**, Oregon Department of Agriculture; **Jim Mair**, Oregon Department of Forestry; **Chris Rauch**, OWGL; **Andrew Bowman**, Defenders of Wildlife; **Ray Abriel**, US Forest Service; **Steven Zylstra**, US Fish and Wildlife Service; **Dale Wilkins**, US Agricultural Research Service; **Chris Bonsignor**, Ducks Unlimited; **Mike Weinberg**, OR Soil & Water Conservation Commission; **Russ Pinto**, The Nature Conservancy; **Rich Vigil**, Gayle Norman, **Danny Burgett**, **Bill White**, **Jay Gibbs**, **Cec Cullison**, **Jim Wright** and **Russ Hatz**, NRCS.

Opening Remarks:

Bob Graham – NRCS.

Fred Ringer represented Larry Frey, who was attending FSA Direct Reciprocal Program Training.

Review of July 23,2002 minutes: Approved as read.

Gayle Norman

Gave an overview of the agenda. Today's meeting will open with a technology presentation and will address EQIP Ranking and Rating, and State Technical Committees. On August 21 & 22, NRCS staff went to Washington, DC to attend a training session that addressing Technical Service Providers, EQIP Ranking and Rating, and State Technical Committees.

Issue papers were provided to OTAC participants a week before the meeting. Copies were provided at the meeting, as well.

Technology Presentation – Russ Hatz

Russ presented a PowerPoint presentation on Conservation Practice Recommendations from an Excel spreadsheet. This program assists the conservation planner to identify conservation practices that have a substantial positive effect on identified resource concerns. This program identifies the types of practices that would be beneficial to the landowner and also identifies negative impacts for resource concerns. The program is on line and the address is: <http://waterhome.brc.tamus.edu/NRCSdata/Tools>. The program was developed in Oregon by the NRCS Technology Staff and has been adopted by many other states as a planning tool.

EQIP Funding and Ranking – Danny Burgett

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill) charges the State Conservationist to develop/determine a process to allocate funds to the local level. The method should be simple, equitable and address Oregon's natural resource needs. Danny discussed the draft procedure for a statewide fund allocation process to distribute EQIP funding in Oregon. Under the new Farm Bill, states are not required states to have EQIP Geographic Priority Areas; consequently, this provides more opportunities for funding decisions. In the issue paper provided prior to the meeting a process was presented.

Each of Oregon's 8 Basins will receive 8% of the total EQIP allocation to the state. The 36% of the remaining funds will be distributed to each basin. This allocation is based on each Basin % of Oregon's long term resource needs as identified in Oregon's Work Load Analysis (WLA). Nine of the 28 core products in WLA were used to evaluate the initial workload by land use or treatment need. The nine were cropland, rangeland, pastureland, forestland, wildlife, irrigation, dry waste, wet waste and wetland. The calculated percent of statewide resource need for each of the eight basins would be:

Basin	% of State EQIP Allocation	Basin	% of State EQIP Allocation
North Coast	6%	Deschutes	14%
Lower Willamette	16%	High Desert	11%
Upper Willamette / Central Coast	10%	John Day/U	18%
South West	11%	SNAKE RIVER	14%

These percentages would determine the initial Basin EQIP allocations. If these funds cannot be obligated by the end of March, funds will be re-allocated with to those basins with conservation plans ready to go to contract.

In summary, the proposed allocation process is

1. Allocate 8% of the state funds to each basin
2. Distribute remaining funds by resource long term needs (WLA)
3. Re-allocate funds that have not been obligated by the end of March.

Each basin work groups will receive 25% of the basin allocation to fund basin priorities. The basin work groups will use the local work group priorities and the input of other stakeholders to determine basin level priorities.

- ❖ Bob Graham – commented on accountability for natural resource based decisions. Oregon NRCS set the strictest conservation planning certification regulations to follow in the nation. Oregon has three levels of planners. Planning certifications requirements will help to ensure that federal dollars are being spent appropriately.
- ❖ Chris Rauch – Stated the need to set the level of accountability as the State Technical Committee. Under the last Farm Bill Geographic Priority Area's were poorly developed and needs to improve for this Farm Bill.
- ❖ Ray Abriel – Stated that the presented process is defensible. Questioned if the WLA data is the most current data. Also, suggested funds be allocated "off the top", e.g., 5-6 percent critical resource need such as resource concerns on non-industrial, privately owned forestland.
- ❖ Jean Wilkinson – Areas such as the wheat growers are now looking to get more funding. Express need to consider no-till and other ways producers may use for conservation actions.
- ❖ Bob Graham- Look at how we can combine some of the other programs. Need to look at these other programs and see how they can balance out. Conservation Security Program is a program that people get paid for already doing conservation practices. The word is out that we want Oregon to be one of the pilot states.

- ❖ Tammy Dennee - Agreed with Jean. But we need to remember that minimum till and regular till is also working. Don't want to leave those farmers out in the dark. Do not want to appear to be grouping our farmers.
- ❖ Dalton Straus – The demands for accountability on how EQIP funds are used is outstanding. Need to be sure to address accountability. Believes that some accountability is lost with the newly defined agency roles in EQIP. Asked Bob Graham to shed some light on the recently signed FSA / NRCS MOU for administrative support for EQIP. Stressed that it is important to make sure these dollars are spent wisely and appropriately.
- ❖ Bob Graham – NRCS is working closely with FSA. Agencies should not be doing things independently, need for cross checking. Under the previous Farm Bill, FSA did all the paperwork for EQIP. The new Farm Bill transferred to NRCS most all of the administrative duties for EQIP. At the national level FSA and NRCS negotiated an agreement.. The agreement identifies the administrative duties of each agency. FSA writes the checks and identifies if a person has program eligibility. NRCS in addition to the program delivery and technical assistance has new duties such as maintaining contracts files and verifying receipts for payments to participants.
- ❖ Johnny Sundstrom – Emergency component for EQIP would be a useful tool. Suggested using a small percentage held until March.
- ❖ Bill White – With respect to WHIP, considering how to develop the most productive way to handle these funds. Challenge is to the basin to identify the resource concerns and finding a way to invest WHIP funds.
- ❖ Rich Vigil – Responded to setting aside EQIP funding for emergencies. Keep in mind that doing this would hamper us from getting National money.
- ❖ Jeff Rola– One thing we can be sure of here in Oregon is fire, drought, and flood in this area. EQIP will handle only one of these three - drought.
- ❖ Bob Graham– Need more time to discuss emergency response. Rich headed up a Drought Team for the West.

Ranking Criteria – Jay Gibbs

In FY03 each state will post on the NRCS National web site their EQIP ranking criteria for public review and information. This will help individuals to determine what priorities are considered in their locality for resource concerns. Oregon would like to simplify and minimize the number of ranking worksheets and to have consistency with all ranking criteria. In order to develop consistency, we are considering state resource concerns developed from an accumulation of resource concerns developed from the local level. Twelve resource concerns were identified for Oregon. Each of the twelve resource concerns will have a local assigned priority weight (multiplication factor) ranging from 1 to 12.

Each county will:

1. Identify priority resource concerns and rank using a localized version of the ranking criteria shown in the handout.
2. Rank their applicants and send the top ranked applicants to Basin Work Group.
3. Basin Work Group will review the list and distribute funding.

Chris – Asked wind erosion could be a ranking criteria.

Jim Mair – Inquired about forestland and how its resource concerns are considered.

Jay – Explained that the ranking process is land use neutral. Need to focus on the resource concern across land uses. Eventually, funding will come down to the priorities used for ranking at the local level.

Jean – Asked if item 11 means habitat plant health or crop plant health?

Fred Ringer – Under the 1996 Farm Bill, there were efforts at the local level to get forestry to get input on the ranking criteria. Did not materialize at the local level. This committee has the opportunity to make our most renewable resource, i.e., forestry, happen. Suggested a 13th category. .

Ray Abriel– OTAC provides advice to the field. OTAC needs to send a strong message of the need to consider private forestland issues and needs.

Johnny Sundstrom – Only see 4 ranking criteria on this list that pertains to my county (central coast). They do not show all the areas of concern.

Bill Braunworth – Maybe need to go to scale on a smaller level.

Darrel Kenops – Need for a couple more categories such as forestland, grazing land etc.

Russ Hatz – Do not see a concern because forestry resource concerns will fit into these categories.

Dale – How will it be ensured that the ranking criteria will be developed from the local level, e.g., input from producers, - not just NRCS staff.

Jay – NRCS will get local input.

Johnny – Asked for more detail on criteria 9.

Russ – Written for suitability about organism.

Dalton Straus – Invasive species or noxious weeds is a major statewide concern.

Bill – Responded to questions about noxious weed control. EQIP not used to just spray for noxious weeds. A conservation system with pest management practices could be developed to not just killing the plant, but to address why the noxious weed is it being established on that specific site.

Russ - Plant concern is one of 66 on the basic list. Need a pest management practice to control and get restoration.

Jeff Rola – For weed management and control, Jeff suggested that controlling weeds as part of pest management may pay for incentive payments.

Bill - Identify resource concern and what would be the prescription. Develop a conservation plan to achieve quality criteria.

Bob Graham – Make sure that when guidance goes out it covers the various land uses. Make it clear how forestry, grazing, wildlife are covered. For weeds – make sure guidance states that here are the ways to incorporate these into practices. We still need to get guidance to field people -- how we can do it.

Dalton – Recommended moving noxious weeds to a statewide concern.

Sam Asai – Expressed the importance of pest management / control.

Small Woodlands - Need something relating to forestry in the ranking procedure.

ODA – Suggested that resource concerns need more linkage with respect to uses of the landscape.

Jean – Need to promote new research findings for pest management in orchards. Pest management may use some chemicals or no chemicals – research has identified good environmental impact. Resource concerns are not clear on this topic.

Chris – Suggested that ranking criteria not be so limited – need to think outside the box.

Jeff Rola – Limitations of funding and eligibility are keeping landowners from participating. Need to have clarification of criteria as soon as possible.

Johnny – Where is the state resource concern in watershed health fit?

Jim – Forestry as a resource concern needs to be added.

Thomas – Need subheadings – ESA issues, diversions, delivery systems increased of stream flow, and fish and water use. Where does ag-water use fit? More explanation.

Darrel Kenops - Criteria 9 suggested that it related to properly functioning condition. Asked for case examples or typical; examples for range, forest would need focused examples.

Bill Braunworth- Locally led and flexible with criteria. Keeping the landowner involved in the local led process will help get this on the ground.

Dalton Straus – Impressed with effort of getting this together and its link with thoughts and process from previous meetings.

Bob – This really helps. What we are really after here in Oregon is healthy watershed. Local groups need to identify the concerns to keep the watersheds healthy. EQIP can help landowners comply with ESA issues and other environmental regulations.

FSA Update by Fred Ringer

CRP Grazing: Veneman announces \$752 million in immediate assistance for livestock producers. Only 13 counties in Oregon qualify for the program. Governor had to make the designation.

This program will particularly help livestock producers who have very few risk management tools available to help during these difficult times. Livestock assistance programs starting signup as of October 1st.

Emergency programs: Emergency Livestock Program – Baker. Fires – Wasco \$123,820 for fencing; Sherman \$50,000 and Lake \$150,000 is pending. Emergency Water Program -- Grant and Harney will be submitting requests. Application for Livestock water handling is pending.

Practice Standard for Reestablishment of Permanent Vegetation Cover. The purpose of this practice is to correct damage to permanent vegetative cover caused by natural disaster. Apply this practice to farmland on which a vegetative cover has been destroyed or seriously damaged by the approved disaster. A representative of NRCS shall have technical responsibility for this practice. If NRCS representative is not available, this responsibility may be delegated to FSA. Voted and majority of people approved as written.

CREP: Funding of a state coordinator for CREP proposed to OWEB last week and was approved.

CLU Digitized Report : Handout on progress. This GIS layer is a key component in Toolkit. Acres, location, field size will be on these layers. Will have in place far ahead of schedule.

Locally Lead: Rich Vigil -- Basin Work Groups in Oregon.

Oregon has adapted national policy with Local Work Groups (LWG) to one that adds the Basin Work Group. Oregon is structured on basins to better focus on watershed health issues. Oregon has an opportunity to improve this process through clarification of roles and responsibilities and communication throughout the system. The OTAC and the LWG are the essential elements that balance local needs with state and national considerations. Oregon has staff shortages limiting its ability to provide technical assistance.

Chris – Concerned about the overlap between Basin and Local Work Group.

Rich answered with the following:

- BWG will be a subcommittee of OTAC. Membership parallel to the membership on the OTAC.

- The designated conservationist for the BWG will be the NRCS (Area) Basin Team Leader. The Chair for the BWG will be determined by the BWG.
- The BWG will provide leadership in reviewing, prioritizing, and recommending EQIP proposals to the NRCS Basin Team Leader for their respective basin area.
- Do we need a basin work group? Depends on who is sitting on it may be a cause for concern. Local and basin work groups are strategic in our approach.

Fred Ringer - Only programs that are necessary should be included in this process. Need to record minutes and be reviewed by whole basin.

Jean- Likes idea of overall group. Not sure how it will finally work. Concerned about possible confusion for the landowner. Needs to tailor process for each basin. The Deschutes basin wide planning effort includes Farm Bill.

Johnny – views this as an inverted process from local district process.

Bill Braunworth: Recommended to combine as much as we can. Cannot go to every group meeting.

Bob – Commented on OTAC participation. OTAC has a balance of 9 federal; 10 state; 7 ag-commodity ; 5 environmental; 2 conservation district; 2 tribes (which have never attended) and 1 private.

Timetable – Need to implement as quick as we can.

Update on Farm Bill Programs – Bill White

Provided a handout of FY02 program fund obligations by program and amounts by basin. This is unofficial. IN FY02 WRP had no technical assistance funding. The WHIP was small – about \$247,000. FY02 is the last year for FIP as it is no longer under NRCS. FIP has been combined into FLEP (the ForestLand Enhancement Program) and is administered by the Forest Service.

In FY03 several new programs will be implemented, such as the Conservation Security Program and the Grassland Reserve Program.

Leveraging Conservation Funds – Gayle Norman

Gayle led a discussion of two new opportunities in the Farm Bill: The Conservation Innovation Grants and Partnership and Cooperation Stewardship Agreements. OTAC provided a list of possible situations to use these programs.

EQIP – Conservation Innovation Grants: Developed to stimulate innovative approaches by leveraging Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection.

Partnership and Cooperation Stewardship Agreements : agreements and designate special projects with State and local agencies, tribes, and non-government organizations to enhance technical and financial assistance provided to producers to address natural resource issues.

List of Concerns from OTAC:

- ❖ Projects focused on Willamette River floodplain- Defenders Biodiversity Project (The Nature Conservancy)
Votes: 4
- ❖ Assess what has been done and look at next steps – Biodiversity/Willamette Restoration Initiative
- ❖ Rangeland Restoration – Shrub/Steepe
- ❖ Interagency cooperation and education on regulatory security. (options for landowners)
 1. Conservation planning and water quality planning
 2. Farm Bill & Oregon Plan encourages conservation planning for watershed health.
- ❖ Niche market/energy/nutrient management -- adjustments – related, e.g., eco-labeling. Bring together so recommendations can incorporate advice.
- ❖ Renewable energy.
- ❖ Increase data available for various planning – pull together use.
- ❖ Increase availability of native seed production.
- ❖ Ability to move quickly with acquisition projects and take advantage of opportunities.

- ❖ Columbia Basin emphasis – explore alternatives.
- ❖ Invasive Species.
- ❖ Applied research and demonstration.
- ❖ Lack of Technical Assistance – need to increase technical assistance.
- ❖ Pilot project – opportunity to use easements for sustainable agriculture use.
- ❖ Small Acreage Landowners in the watershed approach effort.
- ❖ Klamath – Water Banking – Possible presentation to OTAC.

As group for Partnership and Cooperation Grants was formed. The group consists of Andrew Bowman, FX, Bruce Taylor, Bill Braunworth, and Jean Wilkerson. Andrew has met with NRCS people in Washington, DC last week about this opportunity. He got to see what they were thinking. One proposal sent to the governors by the Eastern area people. The total funding will be about 5 percent of the Farm Bill Programs.

Public Comments:

None

OTAC – Miscellaneous:

Jim Mair of ODF, distributed a fact sheet about the recent fires and identified where landowners can go to get help. Eric Henning – Working in two different states. Basin work group is a good direction. Mentioned the Willamette River Proposal.

Parking Lot:

1. Emergency Response – Streamline Planning
2. Critical Resource Needs (Contract Flexibility)
3. Accountability

Closing:

Meeting adjourned at 3:40 P.M.

Next meeting scheduled for November 13, 2002 in Aurora, Oregon. (November meetgin was psotponed until more information is obtained about the forthcoming rules and funding for FY03.)